

What to give your letter-writers

*Each major scholarship comes with its own set of tailored guidelines.
Ask Andrea Wolfe for that information, if applicable.*

In two pages (or the electronic equivalent), with your name, address, phone number, and email address at the top, provide the following information in clear, concise language (no long paragraphs):

1. A brief description of the scholarship.

These descriptions can be found on the scholarship website or, in the case of major national scholarships, at www.bsu.edu/honors/scholarships. Click on the name of the scholarship you're applying for, then cut, paste, and edit info as needed from the first paragraph.

If you're applying for one of the most prestigious scholarships in the country, be sure to tell your recommenders, and let them know their letters are of vital importance to your chances of winning one.

If the scholarship that you're applying for requires letter-writers to address particular qualities in its applicants (e.g., "commitment to career in public service"), be sure to note that information.

2. Selected highlights (in list form) of accomplishments that are pertinent to the scholarship you're applying for and your experience with each recommender.

Common wisdom sometimes suggests giving letter-writers one's résumé, but that's actually bad advice. Even someone who knows and loves you may think, incorrectly, that a good letter of recommendation eloquently paraphrases content on your résumé. Since you're already stating that information in your application, it should not simply be restated in a letter as well. It may, in fact, hurt your chances of winning a scholarship.

Instead, tailor your list to the scholarship and to each particular letter-writer. Be sure to include reminders of important things that you did while studying under, working for, or otherwise interacting with the letter-writer. Provide approximate dates and short descriptions of noteworthy projects, papers, etc. Think about what you hope or expect that particular recommender to say about you and remind him or her of details relevant to that activity or accomplishment.

Be sure your letter-writers understand that you're not telling them what to put in their letters, but that you're simply providing them reference material, should they need it. Most letter-writers will be grateful for the reminders and details.

3. A sentence or two that describe your plans and goals for graduate school (if relevant) and your career.

If you have big plans and visions, don't be afraid to spell them out for your letter-writer. Most major scholarship foundations award their funds to students who will have an impact on their field and/or on society.

4. Logistical information.

a. *Deadline*

- ♦ If you're applying for a scholarship that has a campus review process, give your letter-writers the campus deadline, not the national deadline.

- ♦ If there is no campus review and your letter-writers are sending their letters directly to the foundation, be sure they know the date by which their letters must be submitted or received. (A few small scholarship foundations still require printed letters, which may have a postmark deadline.) It's always a good idea to give letter writers a deadline that's a day or two earlier than the actual deadline, to avoid last-minute headaches.

b. *Submission of letter*

If you're applying for a scholarship that has a campus review process (*not* including the Fulbright; that application has special campus protocol), ask your letter-writers to send their letters to me via email (as an attachment, sent to bstedman@bsu.edu). Let them know that further instructions for submitting the final letter will follow from me, once the campus committee has reviewed your application.

If you're applying for a scholarship that does *not* have a campus review process, you and I can decide together how your letters should be submitted.

Give your recommenders simple, clear instructions about how to submit their letters, whether electronically or in print. Let them know, too, if their letters need to be signed and on letterhead.

c. *Letter greeting*

If you're applying for a scholarship that includes a campus review, provide this line of guidance to your letter-writers: "The greeting line of your letter should not address Barb Stedman or the Ball State campus review committee. Instead, it should address the particular scholarship foundation or, simply, 'the Scholarship Selection Committee.'"

When your recommenders have agreed to write a letter, please let me know, and I'll try to follow up with my own email, as time allows.

Misc. tips

- ♦ **Whenever possible, ask for letters of recommendation in person.**
- ♦ If possible, ask for letters a month before they're needed. Never give less than two weeks.
- ♦ **YOU** are responsible for following up with your letter-writers and making sure they remember to send their letters. A week before the due date, it's smart to send a friendly reminder that the deadline is approaching.
- ♦ Remember to send a heartfelt thank-you note (handwritten, rather than emailed, is best!) to your letter-writers after the letter has been written. Ask them to save their letters on their computers, in case you decide to apply for other scholarships.
- ♦ Let them know the outcome of the scholarship competition!